

## Spring Yard & Garden Prep for Plant Health

Spring in Chicago can be very unpredictable, it can be short, cold, rainy, or dry and warm, we never know about climate change. The official start of Spring is March 20<sup>th</sup>, but the time that the frost is out of the ground and soil temperatures are warming, and trees and shrubs are starting to bud is mid-April. This is the time to clean tools and prune, amend the garden soils, divide perennials, work the lawn, and clean your garden containers.

Tools are the first thing to clean and sharpen. Sharp pruners will cut cleaner and not harm plant stems you will be cutting for shaping, trimming off old hydrangea blooms and stems killed off by winter. Sharpening your shovels and trowels will also make digging much easier. The tools may still have remnants from last year that can contain disease and molds. Bleach is great for disinfecting now and throughout the year, so you do not spread a disease from plant to plant.

Amend your soils for vegetable, perennial, annual beds and trees and shrubs. Mushroom compost, Adoria compost, Espoma Land and Sea compost, all great to amend your soils by mixing on top and letting them percolate into your gardens. Do not roto till so not to disturb the soil structure and microbe activity already there. This will replenish the nutrition taken from last year's plants. Organic granular fertilizers are also a terrific way to get nutrition back into the soil that trees and shrubs have depleted from the soil in past seasons. Lurvey carries many brands from Espoma, Down to Earth, Coast of Main, and True Organics. All add nutrients into the soil for all plants to pick up. The healthier a plant is, the less likely it is to be affected by insects and disease. Proper nutrition helps the plants through environmental extremes like droughts, heat, fluctuating temperatures.

If you have any perennials that have become too large, now is the time to divide as you see them emerge. This will rejuvenate the plants, promote blooms, and give you more plants to spread around your yard. Cut back grasses or any dead stalks on perennials you left for winter interest. Which gives the perennials an unobstructive area to sprout and grow anew.

The lawn may need a dethatching, core aeration, gypsum to open the soil for this year's growth. Also rake any fall leaves or sticks still on the ground so any fertilization can hit the ground. Using a Spring fertilizer with crabgrass control will prevent most crabgrass growth. Prepare any bald spots for reseeding once temperatures are 55 degrees. Remember if you used a crabgrass preventor you cannot reseed for four to six weeks.



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Container gardening is growing in popularity every year as container options and soil choice improve. Clean your containers of any molds or growths with a water – vinegar mixture or dish detergent. Remove the soil if it is still in there and take out any old root structure or debris. Last year's soil can still be used but does need to be amended with new soil of your choice. This will ensure your containers will be clean of any insects and diseases.

If you have any questions or concerns about any plant health issues for insects, disease or environmental issues, there are many ways to contact us at Lurvey's. The most direct way is to visit the store and talk to our plant health staff. Bring photos and some leaves or branches of the affected plant. We can diagnose with the physical material in hand and with the photos of the plant. We will also ask many questions for us to diagnose correctly. On the Lurvey website is a Plant health Submission Form. We supply the questions to answer so we can have all the information needed to make a proper diagnosis. Also supply the availability to attach photos, this is a valuable tool for us to see the issue. Just like bringing in the samples to the store, seeing the problem along with a description is beneficial. Another way to contact the Plant Health department is to email [planthealth@lurveys.com](mailto:planthealth@lurveys.com) You will need to provide what the issue is with your plant or lawn and please provide a couple of photos along with descriptions of conditions.